

Message Text

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PAGE 01 DAMASC 04240 241825Z
ACTION SS-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSO-00 /026 W
-----038875 241834Z /43

O 241731Z JUL 78
FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 8927
INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN
AMEMBASSY BEIRUT IMMEDIATE
AMEMBASSY CAIRO
AMCONSUL JERUSALEM
AMEMBASSY JIDDA
AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV IMMEDIATE
USMISSION USUN NEW YORK

C O N F I D E N T I A L DAMASCUS 4240

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINS, PEPR, SY, LE
SUBJECT: SYRIAN VIEWS ON THE HADATH INCIDENTS

REF: DRAPER-CHARGE TELECON JULY 23

1. CHARGE TELEPHONE DOREIGN MINISTRY DIRECTOR OF AMERICAN AFFAIRS SIAGE MORNING JULY 24 TO EXPRESS CONCERN ABOUT LAPSES IN CEASEFIRE WHICH HAD OCCURRED IN HADATH JULY 21-22 AND AGAIN JULY 23. SAID US HAD RECEIVED CONFUSING REPORTS REGARDING ORIGIN OF THESE INCIDENTS AND WOULD APPRECIATE ANY DETAILS SYRIA COULD PROVIDE. A MILITIA SPOKESMAN HAD STATED, FOR EXAMPLE, THAT SYRIAN FORCES HAD HEAVILY SHELLED AL-HADATH JULY 23 WITH ARTILLERY. SIAGE SAID HE WOULD CHECK AND GET BACK TO US. HE WAS CERTAIN THAT ADF WOULD NOT HAVE BROKEN CEASEFIRE WITHOUT MAJOR PROVOCATION.

2. CHARGE AGAIN SPOKE TO SIAGE AT NOON. SIAGE SAID
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HE HAD DISCUSSED MATTER WITH ACTING FONMIN QADDUR AND FOREIGN MINISTRY WAS ATTEMPTING OBTAIN DETAILS OF HADATH INCIDENTS BUT HAD NO WORD AS YET. CHARGE NOTED THAT OUR REPORTS ON ORIGINS OF THE FIGHTING CONTINUED TO BE CONTRADICTORY. ONE OFFICIAL LEBANESE SOURCE TOLD US THE SYRIAN SPECIAL FORCES WERE TO BLAME. USG WAS VERY CONCERNED ABOUT THIS BREAKDOWN IN CEASEFIRE, CHARGE SAID.

HE HOPED SYRIA WAS WORKING TO PREVENT ANY ESCALATION OF FIGHTING AND TO RESTORE CALM. US HOPED SYRIA WOULD SHOW RESTRAINT IN HADATH AS IT HAD BEEN SHOWING RESTRAINT IN EAST BEIRUT. SIAGE SAID HE WOULD PASS ON THIS MESSAGE TO QADDUR.

3. SIAGE INVITED CHARGE TO MINISTRY AT 1800L AND MADE FOLLOWING POINTS ON BEHALF OF ACTING FONMIN QADDUR: A) THE FIGHTING ON THE 21ST BEGAN WHEN A TRUCK CARRYING SYRIAN ADF ELEMENTS CAME UNDER FIRE FROM AN ARMED GROUP AND SUFFERED TWO SYRIAN SOLDIERS WOUNDED; B) ON THE 22ND ADF FORCES IN AL-HADATH CAME UNDER FIRE REPEATEDLY FROM UNKNOWN ARMED ASSAILANTS. ADF FORCES FINALLY RESPONDED WITH MINIMUM FORCE NEEDED TO SILENCE THE SOURCE OF FIRE; C) THE BALANCE OF FORCES IN THIS AREA IS MASSIVELY IN FAVOR OF THE ADF. HAD IT WISHED IT COULD HAVE CRUSHED ANY ARMED GROUP BUT ITS RESPONSE WAS RESTRAINED; D) ADF FORCES CONTINUE TO BE UNDER STANDING INSTRUCTIONS TO US MAXIMUM RESTRAINT BOTH IN NOT RESPONDING TO PROVOCATIONS AND IN USING MINIMUM AMOUNT OF FORCE REQUIRED WHEN PROVOCATIONS REQUIRE RESPONSE.

4. SIAGE WENT ON TO SAY THERE WAS NO REASON OR LOGIC FOR SYRIA TO BE STIRRING UP SITUATION IN BEIRUT AT THIS TIME. ON THE CONTRARY SYRIA WISHED MAINTAIN THE CEASEFIRE AND KEEP SITUATION CLAM.
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5. SIAGE SAID HE HAD NO INFORMATION ON SITUATION JULY 24 EXCEPT THAT ACCORDING TO RADIO REPORTS FIGHTING HAD DIED DOWN, CHARGE PASSED ON OUR LATEST INFORMATION FROM EMBASSY BEIRUT'S DAILY SIT-REP AND THANKED SIAGE FOR GOING TO TROUBLE OF OBTAINING DETAILS OF INCIDENTS FOR US. WE WERE CONCERNED THAT CEASFIRE REMAIN IN FORCE AND REGULAR EXCHANGES OF INFORMATION AND IDEAS WITH SYRIA WERE VALUABLE TO US, CHARGE SAID.

6. COMMENT: WE WERE NOT SURPRISED TO FIND SYRIAN FOREIGN MINISTRY POORLY INFORMED REGARDING AL-HADATH INCIDENTS. BEIRUT-DAMASCUS COMMUNICATIONS ARE NOT EFFICIENT AND THERE IS OFTEN A DAY OR SO LAPSE TIME IN TRANSMISSION. ADF PROBABLY REPORTS ONLY IN MILITARY CHANNELS AND LESS THAN COMPREHENSIVELY. BELIEVE SARG IS IN NO DOUBT, HOWEVER, ABOUT US CONCERN TO AVOID ANY BREAKDOWN OF THE CEASFIRE IN BEIRUT.
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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: Z
Capture Date: 01 jan 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: REPORTS, ARMISTICE, VIOLATIONS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 24 jul 1978
Decaption Date: 20 Mar 2014
Decaption Note: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 20 Mar 2014
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1978DAMASC04240
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D780303-0779
Format: TEL
From: DAMASCUS
Handling Restrictions:
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1978/newtext/t19780729/aaaaaxp.tel
Line Count: 113
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: ee41f96d-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION SS
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: EXDIS
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: EXDIS
Reference: n/a
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 30 jun 2005
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 1912001
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: SYRIAN VIEWS ON THE HADATH INCIDENTS
TAGS: PINS, PEPR, SY, LE
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odb://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/ee41f96d-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Sheryl P. Walter
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
20 Mar 2014
Markings: Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014